



**Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

Office of Public Affairs  
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 273-6000  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

# **News Release**

August 2001

## **VA Police and The Office of Security and Law Enforcement**

Veterans who use Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities should expect the best in protection and police services. Shouldering these duties are approximately 2,200 trained VA police officers stationed at all major VA medical facilities and many VA outpatient clinics. VA police officers are members of a well-trained police force responsible for enforcing the law and providing protection to patients, visitors, employees and property at VA facilities.

### **Requirements for VA Police Officers**

VA police officers must have specialized law enforcement experience to be hired as a police officer by VA. Standards are set by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and require experience with basic laws and regulations, law enforcement operations, practices and techniques. Prior jobs must include responsibility for protecting life and property and the maintenance of law and order. This experience may have been gained as a police officer for a municipal, county, state or federal agency, a military policeman or a parks or forest service policeman, or in similar positions that require the necessary knowledge and skills in law enforcement. A degree in criminal justice may be substituted for some experience.

Additionally, each police officer is subjected to a background investigation and is required to take an entry physical examination and an annual physical examination to determine physical fitness and emotional stability.

### **VA's Law Enforcement Training Center**

The VA Law Enforcement Training Center (LETC) is located on the campus of the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System in North Little Rock, Ark. The LETC provides training to all VA police officers, emphasizing VA policies and procedures and proper enforcement of federal law. Additionally, training prepares the police officers to deal with typical VA patients. This unique training places special focus on community and customer oriented policing.

Each VA police officer is required to complete 80 hours of initial training and 160 hours of training at the LETC. Participants are taught a wide range of law enforcement topics, to include criminal law, search and seizure, patrol techniques, personal protection, violence in the workplace and techniques in managing potentially volatile situations. Special emphasis is placed on verbal skills and unique topics related to working in a health care environment and other limited jurisdictional settings. The curriculum is

**- More -**

## **VA Police 2/2/2/2**

current, timely and responds to the needs of the community. Approximately 270 newly appointed VA police officers attend the basic course annually.

VA also offers training on a fee-for-service basis to other federal agencies such as Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the National Gallery of Art, the Indian Health Service, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Guard Bureau.

### **VA Police Officers Begin Carrying Firearms**

In the fall of 1996, VA began a pilot program to study the feasibility of arming VA police with 9 mm semi-automatic pistols. Twelve facilities initially participated in the study. In February 1998, a review of the pilot program was conducted. This study included surveys of a randomly selected group of veterans and employees. The results were positive. The following year, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs signed a decision paper to expand the number of facilities authorized to arm their police officers. In accordance with this directive, officers at 15 more facilities were armed during fiscal year 2000. At present, approximately 1,000 VA police officers are armed at 50 facilities. Four more facilities will be added in the next couple months.

### **Security and Safety of Utmost Concern**

VA's philosophy in the use of firearms is to provide as much safety as possible, yet still be effective. Leadership realizes there are concerns and that a firearm demands special responsibility and care. Consequently, VA is meticulous in its training program and evaluates each site for readiness before the officers are armed. A representative of the Office of Security and Law Enforcement (S&LE) conducts a pre-arming site visit to evaluate the facility plan to arm its officers. Once a site has been approved for arming, LETC provides the initial 40 hours of firearm training and the S&LE certifies each officer prior to being armed. Following this initial training, each officer must complete continuing training on such subjects as the use of force, handgun retention and reduced-light firing. They also must qualify on the range twice a year.

The Beretta 9 mm semiautomatic pistol was chosen for its special safety features. This double-action handgun was modified for VA to include a disconnecting device that renders it inoperable when the magazine is removed. This allows an officer to remove the magazine and make the pistol safe when entering certain areas of a hospital such as a psychiatric ward. The safety feature, along with a special security holster, greatly reduces the likelihood of the firearm being taken and used by an unauthorized person.

### **VA's Need for an Armed Police Force**

Since 1986, four VA police officers have been shot and killed in the line of duty. In addition, numerous other police officers were wounded by weapons or were involved in incidents that could have resulted in injuries. Although the force was unarmed until 1996, the need to arm police officers arose many years before. Regrettably, VA medical facilities are not immune to violence. In response to the need to ensure a safe environment, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs has directed that all VA police officers be trained and armed with the VA-approved firearm.

**- More -**

## **VA Police 3/3/3/3**

During the pilot program, VA police chiefs reported that their officers appeared more confident and visible than before they were armed. Most said there was a notable increase in both investigative stops and traffic stops. The chiefs believe it is because their officers feel safer with a firearm.

Just two months after being armed, police officers at the Salisbury, N.C., Medical Center were able to stop a veteran who had shot a physician in the heart. When the VA officers responded to the scene, they found the physician lying on the floor, seriously wounded. When the officers approached the gunman and directed him to drop his firearm, he fired at them. The officers continued to try to persuade the gunman to drop the weapon but he continued firing at them. Police officers returned fire and killed the man. This incident brought into sharp focus the value that a properly trained and armed police force can bring to a facility and the importance of having the capability to protect patients and employees.

### **VA Law Enforcement Authority**

VA's mission to maintain safety and security and to enforce the law throughout its national health care system is based in Title 38 of the U.S. Code, the federal law creating and organizing VA. Chapter 9 of that law gives the Secretary of Veterans Affairs the responsibility for prescribing rules and regulations "for the maintenance of law and order and protection of persons and property on Department property" and designating Department police officers to enforce them. The FBI has primary investigative jurisdiction on federal property and VA maintains a close relationship with the FBI at each location. Jurisdiction is concurrent at most locations, enabling prosecution of crimes in state and local courts, as well as federal.

Within this system of law enforcement, VA's police remain dedicated to a philosophy that permeates VA training and policing: First, aim to prevent crime; second, work to defuse the threat; and finally, take physical action.

### **The Office of Security and Law Enforcement**

The Office of Security and Law Enforcement is responsible for providing guidance, consultation and direct operational support for all elements of VA. Headed by the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Security and Law Enforcement John H. Baffa, it is organized into three main sections:

- Police & Security Service is headquartered at VA Central Office in Washington, D.C. It conducts inspections of field Police and Security Units, conducts investigations, and provides direction, guidance and support for law enforcement programs at VA medical centers and other VA facilities nationwide. The Police & Security Service also provides consultation and liaison services to all elements of VA and works closely with other federal law enforcement agencies.

- Emergency Management and Administration provides direction and guidance to the disaster preparedness and emergency planning functions of VA. This section also manages the personnel and document security responsibilities of VA.

**- More -**

## **VA Police 4/4/4/4**

- VA Law Enforcement Training Center provides professional training for VA police officers throughout the system.

For more information, see the Office of Security and Law Enforcement Web site at:  
<http://www.va.gov/osle>.

# # #